



How to Hatch the Perfect Classroom Chair



An interview with the visionary designers of the popular Flavors[®] chair lines.

On average, K-12 kids spend about 80 percent of their school day sitting. That's a lot of time in the

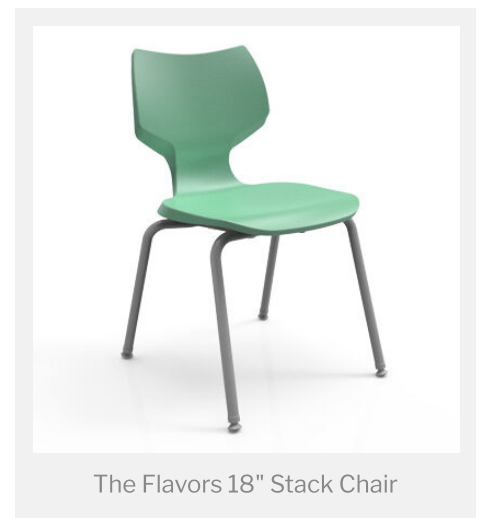
saddle. It's also a big reason why designing classroom seating requires visionary designers and engineers.

With so much at stake, where does designing a new classroom chair begin? How does a team effectively blend the ergonomics, aesthetics, engineering and economics of today – not to mention, academics! – with tomorrow's influences?

For this blog post, we're sharing an interview with Roger Carr and David Williams of [Radar Design](#), London. Beginning in 2008, Smith System collaborated with the talented duo to create Smith's **Flavors** classroom chair lines and debut Smith's Graduated Movement Concept in school seating, a first in the marketplace.

Q: Radar Design has specialized in conceptualizing and engineering commercial furniture and related products for over two decades. How did you come to partner with Smith System in the education arena?

We had worked with manufacturers in the UK on other progressive educational projects. For various reasons, none got past the research stage. But the thinking behind the new concepts we developed paralleled educational trends in America. Around this time, there had been some initiatives in the UK to radically rethink pupil seating, which Smith knew of. A mutual colleague connected us with Smith, and from the start, we had a shared approach.



Q: What was your directive from Smith System?

Design a classroom chair line that would address the new, emerging needs of educators in the K-12 market.

Q: What were/are those emerging needs?

Around the turn of the millennium, teaching methods and equipment had changed so much that many traditional classroom settings were becoming unsuitable. Around 2005, there was growing discussion around "360" classrooms. With that came the need to allow pupils to move, but stay focused and not fidget. One of the concepts of the Flavors chair came from this. We believed that many desk chairs were not designed for working at a desk!

Q: In the past, how had manufacturers approached K-12 seating?

In our opinion, in both the UK and the USA, school chairs had often been made to fit a budget (the price-conscious end of the market). The finer points of more recent ergonomic thinking had not

been considered. The European manufacturers were leaders in this thinking, but their products were rarely specified in education because of price. There was an opportunity to provide the best in ergonomic features with an affordable price.

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Q: What are the most important factors in designing K-12 seating – posture support, flexible sit positions, aesthetics, durability, cost?

Yes, all of those! But also, classrooms and offices are becoming more alike. Less formal and more “homelike.” Technology has provided new ways of working, with looser plans and more individual study options. Meanwhile, class activity has become more like a lecture or seminar. Many of the ideas and thinking from the office furniture world are directly comparable to the classroom now that technology has made them more similar.

Q: You helped Smith System pioneer the Graduated Movement Concept featured in the Flavor® chairs. Explain that concept.

Classroom chairs that flex front, back and torsionally are important because the body must make small changes to be both physically and mentally comfortable to stay happy and alert. It’s essential to enable different ways of working and sitting, while not forcing the body to conform.

Q: Were the Flavors® chairs the first to incorporate this concept in the educational arena?

Yes. Other classroom chairs had flexible backs, and some had the option for four-position seating. But not many concentrated on the forward support for desk work and the reclined position, and none incorporated all of these possibilities into student seating.

Q: How does chair movement help students and teachers?

It helps the future wellbeing [posture, breathing, mental focus] of the pupil, as these chairs get a lot of use in the important early growing period. It helps teachers keep the attention of pupils while moving around the classroom space.

Q: How does Flavors differ from Flavors Noodle?

Flavors Noodle is the full expression of the Graduated Movement Concept, giving more dynamic to the sitting experience. It has a flatter seat so students can sit easily all around the chair. The flex mechanism between the seat and the frame enables an extra element of forward tilt to work at a desk and rear movement to stretch back, while adding angle into the seat pan.

Q: How does the Flavors® chair lines compare to the competition?

The Flavors® line is quite a sophisticated product within their price points. They've received a very positive response in the marketplace.

Thank you, gentlemen.

